



## HARKARN DĀS KANBŪH

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**HARKARN DĀS KANBŪH B. MATHURĀ DĀS MULTĀNI**, the first Hindu author of a Persian work, namely *Eršād al-ṭālebin*, more commonly known as *Enšā'-e Harkarn*, a collection of documents and model letters written by him as a secretary. The details of his early career are not known. He was attached for a long time as a secretary (*monši*) to Nawwāb E'tebār Khan K̄vāja-sarā, later called Momtāz Khan (d. 1034/1625), most probably a Hindu convert to Islam (Bazmee Ansari, p. 225) and a confidant and retainer of the Mughal emperor Jahāngir (1014-37/1605–27). It is not known when Harkarn Dās joined the chancellery of E'tebār Khan, but he was already in his service when E'tebār Khan was appointed governor of Agra in 1031/1622 (Šahnāvāz Khan, I, pp. 704-5).

*Enšā'-e Harkarn* is a celebrated work of epistolary art, containing a collection of fictitious models of various forms of letter compositions. It was lithographed at least twice (in 1869 and 1871) in Lahore. The exact date of its compilation is not known, though references to E'tebār Khan by the obituary formulas of *ḡofrān-panāh* and *reżwān-panāh*, as well as the dates of some letters clearly indicate that it took place after E'tebār Khan's death in 1034, most probably after 1055/1645 in the reign of Shah Jahān (Marshall, p. 176; Mo'men, p. 213). Harkarn undertook the compilation of his work at the suggestion of some friends at Mathurā, who argued that since he had spent his entire life in the pursuits of epistolary art, he should compile a collection of various forms of correspondence (*enšā'*) to be used as a textbook (Harkarn, preamble), hence its title *Eršād al-ṭālebin* in several manuscripts (Maulana



Azad Library, Solaymān collection, Aligarh No. 275; see Marshall, p. 177). The book is divided into a preamble and seven chapters (*bāb*): (1) Royal missives exchanged between kings on diplomatic relations through peace, threats of war, etc.; (2) *farmāns* (*eṣḍār-e farāmin*) containing specimens of edicts (*aḥkām-e divāni*), such as letters addressed to judges, governors, castellans (*kōtvāl*), grant of a *jāgir*, etc.; (3) ministerial rescripts (*parvānajāt*) consisting of *sanad-e kedmat* (letters patent), administrative orders (*ḥasab al-ḥokm*), etc.; (4) petitions (*arā'ezū*) and letters addressed to a superior (*arzdāšt*); (5) letters (*maktubāt*) exchanged between equals, relatives, and friends; (6) forms of civil contracts and legal documents (*qabālāt-e šar'i*); (7) *dastaks* (permits) issued by royal order and by officials concerning departmental transactions and models of a *saqaṭ-nāma* (letter of dismissal, of rejection), *maḥzar-nāma* (summons), and other certificates. The book ends with a stock of the forms of address under the caption *sar-nāma* (superscription).

*Eršād al-ṭālebin* is written in a simple style, free of pedantic embellishments. The influence of the prose style of Abu'l-Faẓl 'Allāmi is evident in the use of certain idioms, phrases, and even ideas that are taken directly from 'Allāmi's *Maktubāt*, though Harkarn has failed to match the charming style of his model (Mo'men, pp. 218-19).

*Enšā'-e Harkarn* was used in schools as a textbook for teaching Persian. It was the first Persian work of its kind to be translated into English (Balfour, 1781) in order to provide employees of the East India Company with model letters for official correspondence with local dignitaries, and was also used in schools as a textbook for teaching Persian.

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